

Novel H1N1 Influenza Frequently Asked Questions for Medical Providers

Updated: June 16, 2009

1. What is Greater Louisville's status?

Over 50 confirmed cases have been identified in Louisville. Virtually all cases identified in our community thus far have been mild.

2. What do we know right now about the illness it causes?

Like regular influenza, it has caused fever, cough, and sore throat most commonly. Gastrointestinal symptoms may be more commonly seen in swine flu than in regular seasonal influenza. Many people apparently died due from swine flu in Mexico. But, for reasons unexplained, very few people in the United States or the rest of the world with this illness have gotten seriously ill.

3. Can I use the rapid influenza A test to diagnose this disease?

Thus far, the answer seems to be yes. Remember, though, that during regular flu season the rapid flu test is only about 80% sensitive—if you test 10 people who really have infection, the test will be positive 8 times. We have no reason to believe it will be better in detecting swine flu. For evaluating most influenza-like illness right now, using a rapid flu test is very reasonable. If someone is more severely ill with what appears to be a viral lower respiratory tract illness, you may want to pursue further testing.

4. Can I treat swine flu with antivirals?

Laboratory study indicates that oseltamivir and zanamivir kill the virus, so treatment in cases with positive flu tests is indicated. The usual 5 day course of these medications should be prescribed. As it stands now, prophylaxis for close contacts is not routinely recommended.

5. Should I be testing every person with fever and either a cough, sore throat or runny nose for swine flu?

No. Most disease identified in this country has been mild, and the infection remains extremely rare in Louisville.

In many clinical settings, such as a busy office practice or emergency department, testing every person with influenza-like illness is a practical impossibility, and holds the threat of preventing truly sick patients from being seen and cared for.

You should anticipate treating the coming weeks and months like a regular flu season: use your clinical judgment, and test and treat those who seem particularly ill, such as those with higher fever or lower respiratory tract symptoms. You should also have a lower threshold for testing the very young, the very old, and those with underlying illness.

The Kentucky state department for public health is currently only conducting swine flu-specific PCR testing for patients with acute febrile respiratory illness *and*

(1) who are experiencing severe illness that indicates the need for hospitalization *or*

(2) who are pregnant *or*

(3) who are living in a group facility setting.

We are continuing to learn about H1N1 swine flu.

The virus continues to spread throughout the country. Fortunately, most of the information we have received about severity of illness is reassuring. Recommendations will continue to change over time. Please continue to check for updates from us at <http://www.louisvilleky.gov/health> as well as the CDC at <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>.

If you have questions about swine flu illness or how to arrange for testing of patients, feel free to contact us at the Louisville Metro Public Health and Wellness Communicable Disease Division at 502-574-6570.

Matt Zahn, MD

Medical Director

Adewale Troutman, MD, MPH, MA

Director

Louisville Metro Public Health and Wellness